WHAT IS WRONG WITH COLLEGE EDUCATION TO-DAY?

Institutions Already Making Important Changes in Methods, Writes Dr. Thwing, and Other Educators Agree in Needs

WHEN a mistaken interpretation was recently placed on remarks by Thomas A. Edison on the general subject of education and on the "found wanting" mental condition of too many college graduates in particular a response from the college was but natural. This response appeared in a dignified form, the way that is usually called "academic," and while admissions of various lacks in prescribed courses were, in instances, frankly made, the defensive attitude could not be hidden.

From evil sometimes good comes, and although the great electrician hastened to explain that his criticism of educational ways in vogue belonged to the elementary branches and he had nothing to say about the colleges, nevertheless the error, which still persists, has been the means of bringing into the light the true uses of college and university as well as valuable suggestions of reform or, at least, change.

A very sweeping statement was that one which Dean West of Princeton threw into the discussion. Once more the question of elective studies, a system that began at the University of Virginia many years ago and is in more or less honor at all our colleges, came under criticism. Dean West would destroy it altogether and put in place of a wabbly kind of choice a system which should rest squarely on fundamentals of English, mathematics, the classics—in fact, a kind of university "rule o' three." What studies Dean West would omit to stress these he did not make clear.

That standards of teaching vary according to the situation of college and university is well known, but that these varying standards are in themselves chaotic is not admitted, although there are frank critics who make this charge. Perhaps the scheme of a nationalistic system advocated by Dr. Arthur T. Hadley, who has just retired from the presidency of Yale, is a veiled admission. At any rate, that the subject of changes is being earnestly studied, that certain branches of learning once so firmly attached to the tree of knowledge are in danger of getting the axe it takes no prophet but a mere ordinary observer of current tendency to realize.

In order to make these things so clear that he who runs may read this newspaper has concerned itself with the following questions:

I. Is Mr. Edison right when he finds that the danger period in education is from the tenth to the fourteenth year, because, he says, the present system of primary teaching atrophies a link between the senses and the brain?

II. Are there standards of teaching to which your institution adheres, and have they produced approximately the results hoped for?

III. If these standards are chaotic, as has been charged by certain educators, would you approve of an utter change or of a simplification of them?

IV. Is the selective course or elective study a success or a failure? If the latter, would you urge a cutting away of this practice and substituting for it a rigid return to fundamental studies?

V. What studies, in your view, should be eliminated in order to get more time to devote to a course best suited to give a general all around education?

With these questions before them as a theme Dr. Charles F. Thwing, president of Western Reserve University, has written for THE NEW YORK HERALD a paper that he calls "Reforms in the Higher Education of the Nation," and Chancellor Brown of New York University, President Judson of the University of Chicago and President King of Oberlin College have given their views, which, in addition to Dr. Thwing's treatise, are presented herewith.

Harry Pratt Judson, president of the University of Chicago, who has expressed decided ideas on improved educational methods.

By DR. CHARLES F. THWING,
President Western Reserve University.

IN certain fields of the higher education no reform is under discussion. The agreement is general and hearty, though not unanimous, that the purpose of college education is sound and solid. That purpose is expressed under many diverse interpretations. To give man understanding, to transmute knowledge into wisdom, to lift the individual above narrowness of intellectual vision into breadth, to create a sense of cubical relations of life, are intimations of the aim of the college. In securing this aim, and perhaps forming a part of the aim itself, the power to think, to reason, to judge, to weigh evidence, to infer from logical premises, represent important steps. To educate man as man, not as a member of one calling, to enlarge and to enrich his simple humanity, is the primary end. In this purpose most college men agree.

Neither is any reform attempted in respect to the value of the "atmosphere" of college life. Reform is thought of regarding its nonsense, its waste of time, its inefficiencies, but not regarding its essential and fundamental sentiment. The college age is the age of youth. It is the age of vision, of hope, of ambition, of the morning's light, of cares which do not burden, of responsibilities which do not fret, of the storing up of memories which are to last. Most critics of the colleges are willing for such an atmosphere to linger in the academic cloisters. In such willingness they have the support of Matthew Arnold and John Henry Newman.

But there are furthermore reforms which have recently been achieved or which are well under way.

One of these reforms relates to legislation and administration. This reform may be summed up in the word unity. Three bodies are most intimately concerned with the carrying on of the American college and university, the trustees (sometimes called regents), the president and the faculty. The trustees are the legislative, or directing body; the president is the executive and the faculty are concerned with teaching and research. The functions thus performed are at once distinct and also intimately related.

At the present time the tendency is strong toward increasing intimacy and effective coworking. For instance, within a few months members of faculties in Western Reserve University have been chosen for the board of trustees and the trustees of this university have also requested the faculties of the several colleges to perform that most delicate and difficult duty of preparing for ultimate submission to themselves the annual budgets. Such increasing intimacy, such allocation of financial responsibilities are subject to objections, but the arguments in favor outweigh the arguments against. The supporting arguments relate largely to the avoidance of misunderstandings, to the promotion of sympathy and to the doing of what is, or is meant to be, essential justice. The easy objection to this new method is found in the evil that members of faculties who are great scholars and teachers may be easily diverted from their most important duties to the mere serving of academic tables. They are called to be priests of the altar, and they may become mere deacons (important as the office of deacon is).

Passing of Student's Interest From Linguistic to Philosophic Subjects

A second reform is also accomplished, and whether it be good or bad opinion is divided. It is the passing over of the interest of the student from linguistic and philosophic subjects to social themes. Philosophy, the queen of the academic realm, has given up half of her domain to psychology, and the other half is a bit less loyal. Latin commands no longer a general following and Greek retains only a few defenders of her historic and noble fortresses. In the place of such traditional disciplines we have the human studies—history, English literature, economics, sociology, government and political science. We also have for the many who propose to enter medicine as a profession the pursuit, and a necessary pursuit, too, of the natural and physical sciences. To discuss whether these changes be good or bad would enlarge these columns into volumes, but I am only trying to point out what has occurred and what is still going on.

One principle or fact lying behind this movement is the desire of the student to make a more direct approach to the studies which he regards as of primary value. For instance, he esteems government or economics as of primary value. In the earlier time he would have entered into the learning of their complex and comprehensive facts and problems from a study of Latin and of mathematics. Such hard disciplines, it was held, would have fittingly prepared him to learn and to reason about economic or political phenomena. Now, on the contrary, he prefers to enter into such learning and reasoning immediately and directly. This desire, I believe, misleads the student; he is not fitted, a typical freshman, to profit in a high degree by so early study of and reflection (if he reflect) on problems and questions so fundamental, so diverse, so complex and so difficult to the half trained mind. He can understand and appreciate only "as through a glass darky."

A third change which is still progressing is a change from the old system of recitation in a classroom holding a score or two score of students to a lecture given in a hall to hundreds of auditors. This change is a change for the bad or for the worse. It is change in educational method, as the second reform I noted was a change in content. The causes of this change are several, but the immediate reason lies in the inadequacy of the college staff for the caring for small and many classes. The teaching staff was impaired in numbers by the war conditions, and the damage still exists.

The change from the method of the recitation to the method of the lecture is a change, or at least is the peril of a change, from intellectual quickening to intellectual stagnation, from intellectual acuteness to intellectual obtuseness, from intellectual laboriousness to intellectual laziness, from intellectual initiative and self-dependence to intellectual vicariousness. To the advanced and mature student the lecture system has many and rich advantages; to the immature it has few.

Passing into a broader field we found two or three reforms closely connected, which are of the greatest value and which possess rich promise of fruitfulness.

One of these reforms touches upon the relations of colleges to each other. Formerly colleges were inclined to be jealous rivals. Intercollegiate depreciations ruled in the academic exchanges. These depreciations were current among trustees and graduates as well as among students and professors. Such a mood and outlook no longer obtain. It is recognized that all colleges and universities rest on the same foundation—public confidence and support; that all use the same essential means and by similar methods, and that all are going forward to an identical end, the training of the democracy. Each has work far exceeding its power and each has students outnumbering its teaching facilities.

It has, indeed, come to be recognized that the enlargement of one college finally helps on the enlargement of all, and that the increase of gifts to one university or one class of universities ultimately results in the increase of endowment of all sister institutions.

Such reconciliations are accompanied, too, with a growing sense of the duty of each university of adjusting its work to its own environment and constituency. In this sense each institution should seek to avoid duplication of academic service and equipment. Alike, and necessarily alike, in giving instruction in many fundamental subjects, universities may properly differ in giving instruction and in pursuing researches in certain unique fields and refinements of learning. Certain American archæological researches, for instance, can best be pursued in New Mexico and Arizona; let not Harvard or Yale or Princeton make any similar attempt. Certain governmental or sociological studies or researches can best be followed out in New York city; let not the Western universities spend money in like fields. Such intercollegiate differentiations are economical in money and in personnel and promotive of high scholastic achievement.

The actual exchange of teachers themselves is likewise promising of fine results. Such exchanges are not limited to this country. Before the war German and American exchanges were in progress. French and English still continue. Harvard has for several years, too, given of her distinguished scholars to colleges in Iowa, Colorado and other States for a teaching service covering months of each annual session.

Neither are such hospitalities, given and accepted, confined to the teaching staff. Students also belong to such reciprocities. The most outstanding instance, of course, is found in the Rhodes scholars. This British-American system is becoming more and more firmly lodged in the universities and colleges of the United States, and Oxford, the welcoming and hospitable mother, recognizes its beautiful and lasting worth. On the opposite side of the academic guest and host, if only an American Cecil Rhodes could by gift or bequest lay down a similar foundation to endow British students, both men and women, for entering American institutions the circle of academic reciprocity would be made complete. Some time, and perhaps soon, such a foundation will be laid.

Wider Appreciation of College Promotes Fellowship of World

In this enlargement of academic reformation the appreciation of the worth of the university and the college in promoting the fellowship of the world is becoming more and more evident. With or without formal leagues of nations, the nations are becoming more united, despite superficial evidences to the contrary, and in such union and in such unity the university is creating reciprocal atmospheres of good will and is educating men into the fellowships that belong to broad vision, to high human and humane purpose and to our appreciation of spiritual values. If commerce is the golden cable that unites nations, the university stands for the truth and for the manhood which joins individuals and races.

Yet there are other reforms, contemplated or attempted, which merit brief consideration. Of them, perhaps the proposed or actual increase in fees for tuition is most timely. Such increase arises in part from the high costs caused by the war. It also arises from a firmer belief that those who have the direct benefit of the higher or professional education should meet a large share of its cost. The higher education is expensive and becomes more expensive.

It becomes more expensive by reason of the enlargement of its facilities of instruction and also by reason of its improved methods. Higher education, too, has ceased in its great relations to be regarded as a charity. Economically, however, it is still a charity. For each student usually pays about one-half of its actual cost. Be it added that medical education is the most costly of all forms of education. Each medical student costs the nation each year of his course in the best schools from $800 to $1,800. The School of Medicine of Western Reserve pays out for each student about $1,500 a year and he pays back $200.

In the undergraduate college is a distinct movement toward making education pay for itself. The movement will not, and perhaps should not, wholly succeed, but the tendency is wholesome and necessary.

With this increase at the other end of the academic budget is another increase, viz., in the salary of the professor. Most worthy to, is this movement and fraught with hopefulness. Among many reasons which the movement commands is the reason that intellectual services should receive a higher pecuniary recognition. In such services money is never an end, but money is a condition. Pure intellectual work deserves, for the safety of the Republic and of the race, larger material remuneration.

Yet it is to be said—and the saying illustrates the need of a certain special academic emphasis—that more constant attention should be given to the personal element in education. America knows that the man is more important than the machine, the boy than the building, the spiritual person than the physical part of that person, but America should feel this higher importance.

The colleges are coming to recognize this higher importance, and in the future this recognition will go on into richest results for the noblest culture of the individual and of the whole community.

To one further reform, now quietly under way, I wish to refer; it is the change from emphasis on the subjects or courses of study to the student himself.

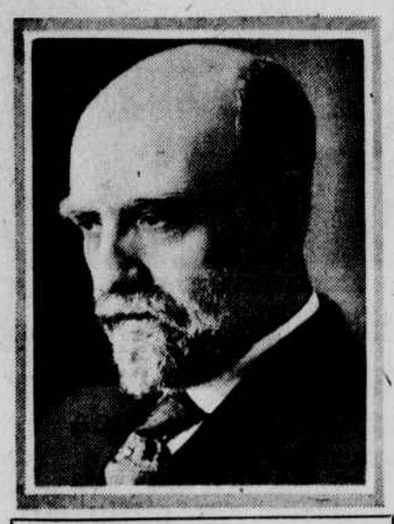
Faculties have been concerned a great deal with the number of hours which the student has devoted to this department or to that division; to the number of "credits" he has gained in mathematics or modern language. Faculties have been prone to the peril of observing their own rules, so prone that they have been in peril of forgetting the real and ultimate goal for which the college was provided and to which they devote themselves, viz., the student.

Hopeful at present is the condition arising from the transfer of this interest to the student himself. The primary question is: Has the student become an educated man? Does the student belong to the society of scholars? Has the student learned somewhat of the great business of life? It is good in itself, and it is even better in hopefulness that the human element is taking more fully its proper place in faculty deliberations.

The American college and university is still only an acorn. But with nourishing and favoring conditions this acorn shall become a tree, a tree for the shielding and the strengthening of the nation and of the nations.

Dr. Charles F. Thwing, author and educator, president of Western Reserve University, who writes of reforms needed in education.

Dr. Judson of the University of Chicago Would Shorten School Courses---Dr. King of Oberlin Upholds Present Ways



Elmer E. Brown, Chancellor of New York University, who contributes important views on the general subject of educational reform.

Chancellor Brown Favors More Methodology of Study

CHANCELLOR ELMER E. BROWN of New York University admits that he is chiefly interested in the discovery of that period of a young man's life when he makes his own decision either to learn or not to learn.

"In my observation," he writes, "the chief danger period in education is a four year period covering the last three years of the grammar school and the first year of the high school. The transition from the first to the second year of the high school is very nearly as perilous as that from the last elementary year to the first high school year. It is perhaps to be expected that the first year of the high school should sift out students who are unwilling or unable to pursue the high school course to the end, but we have as yet no adequate provision for an educational alternative in the case of those who are found to be misfits in the ordinary high school, whether literary or technical.

"In New York University we have never gone the full length of free election of college courses. We have always made definite requirements, with a view to both breadth and coherence in the work of the individual student. There are two things which seem to be desirable as definite requirements of a college course, which, nevertheless, we have not yet found it practicable to require. One of these would be a severe introductory training in the methodology of thought and of study. Our courses in laboratory science provide such an introduction to methodology on one side of the curriculum, but this is only fragmentary. We have yet to work out an introductory course which shall be organically related to all that follows, in some such way as the course in formal logic was introductory to the whole curriculum of the mediæval universities.

"We need for our juniors and seniors a course which has not yet been provided, introductory to the mature practice of living. Such a course should concern itself with the choice of a vocation and with the other relations of the citizen to the community. It should be civic, economic and ethical in its character—all three. I hope to see such a course worked out in some of our colleges. In the meantime we shall all be interested in following the development of the new course in introduction to American institutions which has been introduced at Columbia University."

Dr. Judson Urges Radical Changes in Curriculum

From Chicago comes a view that if carried into action would be drastic in its effect on educational methods. It is voiced by President Harry Pratt Judson of the University of Chicago. Here is this radical opinion in President Judson's own words:

"In my opinion, there is altogether too much time spent in the elementary schools. I believe that the work which is ordinarily spread over eight years could be adequately done in six. As a matter of fact, we have tested this in the laboratory schools of the University of Chicago. We have done the work in seven years even better than was formerly done in eight, and shortly it will be done in six.

"I believe there should be a radical change in the curriculum of our schools and colleges. Our experience here has confirmed the belief that the elective system needs modification, and we require now not so much specific subjects as specific groups of subjects.

"There is very much waste of time and of energy in the curriculum. Colleges overlap the secondary schools and secondary schools overlap the elementary schools."

Dr. King Sees No Chaos In Present Conditions

President Henry Churchill King of Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio, takes up the five questions in order:

"I.—I doubt whether any single period in the course of education can be held responsible for unsatisfactory results.

"II.—We are trying to hold before ourselves pretty definitely certain educational and psychological principles. Perhaps I cannot put our point of view more briefly than to say that it seems to me that college education should bring the student into some personal sharing in the great intellectual and spiritual achievements of the race. And for our own time that clearly implies that the college should help its students to some genuine personal sharing in the scientific spirit and method, in the historical spirit, in the philosophic mind, in æsthetic appreciation, in the social consciousness with the great ethical determinations (including some insight into economic and social and political conditions) and religious discernment and commitment. This general requirement indicates the main lines of the college curriculum, but it calls for much more than a mere acquaintance with the facts in these various realms. It sees clearly that the educational goal is not reached in any of these realms without a personal sharing in the corresponding spirit, and that this sharing in the spirit is the vital matter.

"III.—I do not think that the college standards need to be regarded as chaotic at all. When they are rightly thought through they form a rational unity that can be well justified.

"IV.—I think there is no reason why there should not be a considerable elective element in a college course of study, but it should be coupled with a carefully thought out group or major system that would guard the outstanding needs indicated in Point II.

"V.—I do not think it is desirable to prescribe everything in a college course of study. And, other things being equal, a fairly wide range of election for the part of the course left elective is desirable rather than otherwise."

Important Changes in College Methods Suggested by Leading Educators

COLLEGE reforms as DR. CHARLES F. THWING, president of the Western Reserve University, sees them accomplished or under way:

"Reform in the college is regarding its nonsense, its waste of time, its inefficiencies but not regarding its essential and fundamental sentiment.

"One reform relates to legislation or administration. It is summed up in the word 'Unity.'

"A second reform that has been accomplished is the passing over of the interest of the student from linguistic and philosophic subjects to social themes. Philosophy has given up half of her realm to psychology, Latin commands no longer a general following, Greek has only a few defenders of her historic and noble fortresses.

"Behind this movement is the desire of the student to make a more direct approach to the studies which he regards as of primary value.

"In the relations of colleges to each other the enlargement of one helps on the enlargement of all. But each should avoid duplication of equipment.

"Increase in the salary of the professor is a most worthy movement of reform, fraught with hopefulness.

"A further reform is the change from emphasis on the courses of study to the student himself.

"Another is the recognition of colleges of their primary end, which is to educate man as man, not as a member of one calling, and to enlarge and to enrich his simple humanity."

CHANCELLOR E. E. BROWN of New York University looks for the establishment of a course introductory to the mature practice of living.

"Such a course should concern itself with the choice of a vocation and with the other relations of the citizen to the community. It should be civic, economic and ethical."

PRESIDENT H. C. KING of Oberlin College believes that college education should bring the student into some personal sharing in the intellectual and spiritual achievements of the race.

"The educational goal is not reached without this personal sharing and this sharing in the spirit is the vital matter."

PRESIDENT H. P. JUDSON of the University of Chicago sees the necessity of a radical change in the curriculum of our schools to the colleges.

"There is very much waste of time; colleges overlap the secondary schools and secondary schools overlap the elementary schools."